

A

SERMON

DELIVERED AT THE OPENING

OF THE

CONNECTICUT ASYLUM

FOR THE

EDUCATION AND INSTRUCTION OF DEAF AND DUMB PERSONS,

AT THE REQUEST OF THE DIRECTORS, ON SUNDAY EVENING,

APRIL 20th, 1817,

IN THE BRICK CHURCH IN HARTFORD.

BY THOMAS H. GALLAUDET.

Printed for the benefit of the Asylum.

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AT an adjourned meeting of the Directors of the Connecticut Asylum for the education and instruction of Deaf and Dumb persons, holden at the Asylum on the 25th of April 1817.

VOTED, That **WM. W. ELLSWORTH** and **JOSEPH TRUMBULL**, Esqrs. be a Committee to present the thanks of this board to the **REV. T. H. GALLAUDET**, for his Sermon preached before this society on the 20th instant, and request a copy of the same for publication.

A true copy of the record,

Attest,

J. B. HOSMER, Clerk.

A SERMON.

JUST two years have elapsed, since the first steps were taken towards the establishment, in this city, of an Asylum for the instruction of the deaf and dumb. Those who then embarked in this enterprize, felt it to be their duty to commend its future prospects to the protection of that *Arm*, which moves so easily the complicated springs of human action, and wields, with unerring wisdom, the vast machinery of providence. Their united supplications ascended from the lips of one, whose venerable presence has so often filled this sacred desk, and whose spirit perhaps now witnesses the fulfilment, in some good degree, of his wishes, and the answer of heaven to his requests. His voice no more guides our devotions, nor animates us in the path of duty!—But his memory is cherished in our hearts, and, on occasions like the present, while we mourn his absence and feel his loss, let it be a source of grateful consolation to us, that the undertaking, of which this evening is the anniversary, began under the hopeful influence of his prayers. It has met indeed with difficulties, and still labours under embarrassments, which are incident to almost all the untried efforts of benevolence. Yet, in its gradual progress, it has been encouraged by the smiles of a kind providence, and is at length enabled to commence its practical operation.

At such a season, the Directors of its concerns have thought, that a remembrance of past favours, and a conviction of future dependence on God, rendered it proper again to unite in solemn acts of religious worship. These acts they have made thus public, from a grateful sense of the general interest that has been expressed towards the Asylum, and it is at *their* request that the speaker rises to address this respectable assembly.

He enters upon the duty which has thus devolved upon him, not reluctantly, yet with diffidence and solicitude, principally fearing that the cause of the deaf and dumb may suffer, and yet hoping that God, in whose hands the feeblest instruments are strong, will deign to make our meditations not only productive of benefit to the unfortunate objects of our pity, but of eternal good to our own souls. And, my friends, how soon would the apologies of the speaker, and the implored candour of his hearers, pass into forgetfulness, could we feel that we are in the presence of Almighty God, and that the awful destinies of our immortal existence are connected with the events of this passing hour. May the Spirit of Grace impress these truths upon our hearts, while we take as the guide of our thoughts that portion of scripture which is contained in the

35TH CHAPTER OF ISAIAH, AND THE 5TH AND 6TH VERSES.

“ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.”

These words depict a part of the visions of futurity which gladdened the eye of Isaiah, and irradiate his writings with so cheering a lustre, that he has been called “ the evangelical prophet.” His predictions are assuming in our day, some of their most glorious forms of fulfilment. For although they had a more direct reference to the time of our Saviour, by whose miraculous energy, the ears of the deaf were opened, and the tongue of the dumb loosened, yet, without doubt, as might be proved from the general scope and tenour of the prophetic writings, they equally allude to the universal diffusion of the gospel in these *latter* ages of the church, and to its happy influence upon the hearts of all mankind. The same Saviour, who went about doing good, is also the Lord of this lower creation. He once performed the acts of his kindness by the mere word of his power; he *now* is mindful of the necessitous, and makes provision for them, through the medium of his providential dispensa-

tions. It should be matter, therefore, of encouragement to us, that the establishment, which is now ready to receive within its walls the sons and daughters of misfortune, however humble may be its sphere of exertion, is not overlooked in the economy of the Redeemer's kingdom ; that its probable influence is even shadowed forth in the sayings of prophecy ; and that it forms one link in that golden chain of universal good-will, which will eventually embrace and bind together the whole family of man. Let it awaken our gratitude to think, that our feeble efforts are not disregarded by the great Head of the church, and that we are permitted thus to cast our mite into his treasury.

In the chapter, from which the words of my text are taken, the prophet has described the blessings of the Redeemer's kingdom, in the richest colours of Oriental imagery. He portrays, by the strongest and boldest figures, the joy that will be diffused throughout the earth, when the Gospel of Jesus Christ shall have been proclaimed to all people, and its principles made the universal rule of thought and conduct. He would thus teach us the intimate connexion, even in this world, between holiness and happiness, and excite our efforts towards hastening on the latter day glory of the church, by placing before us the advantages that will result from it. Every exertion, then, of christian benevolence, which forms a part of the great system of doing good, is entitled, so to speak, to the encouragements which the prophet holds forth. I shall not, therefore, depart from the spirit of the text, if, on the present occasion, I attempt to describe some of the benefits which will result from the exertions which are making for the improvement of the deaf and dumb, and thus show how it will happen, that in this department of christian benevolence, " in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert."

The whole plan of my discourse, then, will be to state several advantages which will arise from the establishment of this Asylum, and to propose several motives which should inspire those who are interested in its welfare, with renewed zeal, and the hopes of ultimate success.

The instruction of the deaf and dumb, if properly conducted, has a tendency to give important aid to many researches of the philanthropist, the philosopher, and the divine.—The philanthropist and the philosopher are deeply interested in the business of education. The cultivation of the human mind is paramount to all other pursuits ; inasmuch as spirit is superior to matter, and eternity to time. Youth, is the season in which the powers of the mind begin to develop themselves, and *language*, the grand instrument by which this developement is to take place. Now it is beyond all doubt, that great improvement has been made in the mode of instructing children in the use and power of language. To what extent these improvements may *yet* be carried, time alone can determine. The very singular condition in which the minds of the deaf and dumb are placed, and the peculiar means which are necessarily employed in their instruction, may furnish opportunities for observation and experiment, and the establishment of principles, with regard to the education of youth, which will not be without essential service in their general application. How much light also, may in this way, be thrown upon what are supposed to be the *original truths*, felt and recognised to be such by the mind, without any *reasoning process*. Many speculations, too, which now are obscure and unsettled, respecting the faculties of the human mind, may be rendered more clear and satisfactory. How many questions, also, may be solved, concerning the capability of man to originate *of himself*, the notion of a God and of a future state, or, admitting his capacity to do this, whether, as a *matter of fact*, he ever would do it. What discoveries may be made respecting the *original notions* of right and wrong, the obligations of conscience, and, indeed, most of the similar topics connected with the moral sense. These hints are sufficient to show, that aside from the leading and more important uses of giving instruction to the deaf and dumb, their education might be made to subserve the general cause of humanity, and of correct Philosophy and Theology.

But I pass to considerations of more immediate advantage ; and one is, that of affording consolation to the relatives and friends of these unfortunate. Parents ! make the case your own ! Fathers and mothers ! think what would be your feelings, were the son of your expectations, or the daughter of your hopes, to be found in this unhappy condition. The lamp of reason already lights its infant eye ; the smile of intelligence plays upon its countenance ; its little hand is stretched forth in significant expression of its wants ; the delightful season of prattling converse has arrived ; but its artless lisping is in vain anticipated with paternal ardour ; the voice of maternal affection falls unheard on its ear ; its *silence* begins to betray its misfortune, and its look and gesture soon prove, that it must be forever cut off from colloquial intercourse with man, and that parental love must labour under unexpected difficulties, in preparing it for its journey through the thorny world upon which it has entered. How many experiments must be made before its novel language can be understood ! How often must its instruction be attempted before the least improvement can take place ! How imperfect after every effort, must this improvement be ! Who shall shape its future course through life ? who shall provide it with sources of intellectual comfort ? who shall explain to it the invisible realities of a future world ? Ah ! my hearers, I could spread before you scenes of a mother's anguish, I could read to you letters of a father's anxiety, which would not fail to move your hearts to pity, and your eyes to tears, and to satisfy you that the prospect, which the instruction of their deaf and dumb children opens to parents, is a balm for one of the keenest of sorrows, inasmuch as it is a relief for what has been hitherto considered an irremediable misfortune.

The most important advantages, however, in the education of the deaf and dumb, accrue to those who are the subjects of it, and these are advantages, which it is extremely difficult for those of us, who are in possession of all our faculties, duly to appreciate. He, whose pulse has always beat high with health, little understands the rapture of

recovery from sickness. He, who has always trod the soil, and breathed the air, of freedom, cannot sympathize with the feelings of ecstasy, which glow in the breast of him, who, having long been the tenant of some dreary dungeon, is brought forth to the cheering influence of light and liberty.

But there is a *sickness* more dreadful than that of the body ; there are *chains* more galling than those of the dungeon—the *immortal mind preying upon itself*, and so imprisoned as not to be able to unfold its intellectual and moral powers, and to attain to the comprehension and enjoyment of those objects, which the Creator has designed as the sources of its highest expectations and hopes. Such must often be the condition of the uninstructed deaf and dumb ! What mysterious darkness must sadden their souls ! How imperfectly can they account for the wonders that surround them. Must not each one of them, in the language of thought, sometimes say, “ What is it that makes me differ from my fellow men ? Why are they so much my superiors ? What is that strange mode of communicating, by which they understand each other with the rapidity of lightning, and which enlivens their faces with the brightest expressions of joy ? Why do I not possess it, or why can it not be communicated to me ? What are those mysterious characters, over which they pore with such incessant delight, and which seem to gladden the hours that pass by me so sad and cheerless ! What mean the ten thousand customs, which I witness in the private circles and the public assemblies, and which possess such mighty influence over the conduct and feelings of those around me ? And that termination of life ; that placing in the cold bosom of the earth, those whom I have loved so long and so tenderly ; how it makes me shudder !—What is death ?—Why are my friends thus laid by and forgotten ?—Will they never revive from this strange slumber ?—Shall the grass always grow over them ?—Shall I see their faces no more forever ?—And must *I* also thus cease to move and fall into an eternal sleep” !!

And these are the meditations of an *immortal mind*—looking through the grates of its prison-house upon objects, on which the rays of revelation shed no light, but all of which are obscured by the shadows of doubt, or shrouded in the darkest gloom of ignorance. And this mind *may* be set free, *may* be enabled to expatiate through the boundless fields of intellectual and moral research—may have the cheering doctrines of life and immortality, through Jesus Christ, unfolded to its view ; may be led to understand who is the Author of its being ; what are its duties to him ; how its offences may be pardoned through the blood of the Saviour ; how its affections may be purified through the influences of the Spirit ; how it may at last gain the victory over death, and triumph over the horrors of the grave. Instead of having the scope of its vision terminated by the narrow horizon of human life, it stretches into the endless expanse of eternity ;—instead of looking, with contracted gaze, at the little circle of visible objects, with which it is surrounded, it rises to the majestic contemplation of its own immortal existence, to the sublime conception of an infinite and supreme intelligence, and to the ineffable displays of his goodness in the wonders of redeeming love.

Behold these immortal minds !—Some of them are before you ; the pledges, we trust, of multitudes who will be rescued from the thralldom of ignorance : pursue, in imagination, their future progress in time, and in eternity, and say, my hearers, whether I appreciate too highly the blessings, which we wish to be made the instruments of conferring upon the deaf and dumb ?

For the means of anticipating these blessings, the deaf and dumb owe much to the liberality of generous individuals in our sister states ; whose benevolence is only equalled by the expanded view which they take of the importance of concentrating, at present, the resources of the country in *one establishment*, that, by the extent of its means, the number of its pupils, and the qualifications of its instructors, it may enjoy the opportunity of maturing a uniform

system of education for the deaf and dumb, and of training up teachers for such remoter places, as may need similar establishments.

This State, too, has we trust given a pledge that it will not abandon an Asylum, which its own citizens have had the honour of founding ; and which claims a connexion, (a humble one indeed,) with its other humane and literary institutions.

In this city, however, have the principal efforts been made in favour of this undertaking. *Here*, in the wise dispensations of his providence, God saw fit to afflict an interesting child with this affecting calamity, that her misfortune might move the feelings, and rouse the efforts, of her parents and friends, in behalf of her fellow-sufferers. *Here*, was excited, in consequence, that spirit of research, which led to the melancholy discovery that our own small state probably contains one hundred of these unfortunate. *Here*, were raised up the original benefactors of the deaf and dumb, whose benevolence has enabled the Asylum to open its doors for the reception of pupils, much sooner than was at first contemplated. *Here*, the hearts of many have been moved to offices of kindness, and labours of love, which the objects of their regard will have reason ever to remember with affectionate gratitude ; and *here* is witnessed, for the first time in this western world, the affecting sight of a little group of fellow-sufferers assembling for instruction, whom neither sex, nor age, nor distance, could prevent from hastening to embrace the first opportunity of aspiring to the privileges that we enjoy, as rational, social, and immortal beings. *They* know the value of the gift that is offered them, and are not reluctant to quit the delights of their native home—(delights doubly dear to those whose circle of enjoyment is so contracted,) nor to forsake the endearments of the parental roof, that they may find, in a land of strangers, and through toils of indefatigable perseverance, the treasures of wisdom and knowledge ! How can the importunity of such suppliants be rejected ! Hard is that heart which can resist such claims upon its kindness.

Nor, we trust, will motives be found wanting for *future* exertions in behalf of these children of misfortune. It is always more blessed to give, than to receive.—Efforts of charity, prudently and usefully directed, never fail abundantly to repay those by whom they are made. This is true, not only with regard to individuals, but also public bodies of men. That town, whose character is one of benevolence and good-will towards the unhappy, enjoys, in the opinion of all the wise and good, a reputation more exalted, more valuable, more noble, than it can possibly gain by the most extensive pursuits of commerce and the arts ; by the most elaborate improvements in trade or manufactures, by the richest displays of its wealth, or the splendour of its edifices ; by the proudest monuments of its taste or genius. It gains, too, the smiles of Heaven, whose blessings descend upon it in various forms of divine munificence. While the hearts of its inhabitants expand in charity towards others, and the labours of their hands are united in one common object, they learn *together* the pleasure of doing good,—they find, at least, one green spot of repose in the desert of life, where they may cull some fruits of paradise, and draw refreshment from streams that flow from the river of God. They feel that they are fellow pilgrims in the same wilderness of cares and sorrows, and, while they look to that country to which they are all hastening, while they tread in the footsteps of Him *who went about doing good*, how quickly do their differences of opinion soften ; the lines of sectarian division melt away ; and even political jealousies and animosities retire into the shades of forgetfulness.

Yes, my hearers, godliness hath the promise of this life, as well as of that which is to come. The spirit of christian benevolence, is the only one which will change, completely, the aspect of human affairs. It has already begun to knit together the affections, not only of towns and villages, but of numerous sects throughout the world, and seems to be preparing to embrace within its influence even states and kingdoms. On its hallowed ground, a respite is given to political and religious warfare ;—men lay down the weapons of con-

tention, and cherish, for a season at least, the divine temper of peace on earth, and good will towards men.

Every charitable effort, conducted upon christian principles, and with a dependence on the supreme Head of the church, forms a part of the great system of doing good, and looks forward to that delightful day, when the earth shall be filled with *righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.*

While, therefore, my hearers, I would endeavour to excite an interest in your hearts in behalf of our infant establishment, by portraying its advantages, and addressing to you motives of encouragement with regard to its future progress, drawn from topics of a more personal and local kind, permit me to place before you the purest and noblest motive of all, in this, and in every charitable exertion ;—*the tendency it will have to promote the welfare of the Redeemer's Kingdom.*

It was the future advent of this kingdom which filled the heart of the prophet with rapture, when he wrote the chapter which has been read in our hearing. Do we participate, in any degree, of *his* spirit? Do our efforts for doing good, however humble may be their sphere of influence, proceed from a wish that *thus* we may be made the instruments of advancing that happy period, when *the heathen shall be given to Christ for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession*; when, through the influence of his Gospel, and the efficacy of his grace, “ the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose ;” when “ the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion, with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads : when they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”

It is Jesus Christ whom we are *thus* bound to love, to imitate, and to obey. We are stewards, but of *his* bounty ; we are labourers in *his* vineyard. *Whatsoever* we do, should be done in *his* name. For it is by this *test*, that all our efforts to do good will be tried at the great day of his dread and awful retribution. Let us not fail then to make

a suitable improvement of this occasion, by inquiring, whether our benevolence towards men, springs from love towards the Saviour of our souls ; whether our humanity is something more than the offspring of mere *sympathetic tenderness* ; for it is a truth which rests on the authority of our final Judge, that, without the principle of divine love within our breasts, we may bestow *all our goods to feed the poor, we may give our very bodies to be burned*, and yet by all this be profited nothing.

While we seek, therefore, to sooth the distresses and dispel the ignorance of the unfortunate objects of our regard ; while we would unfold to them the wonders of that religion, in which we profess to believe ; and set before them the love of that Saviour, on whom all our hopes rest ; let us be grateful to God for the very superior advantages which *we* enjoy ; consider how imperfectly we improve them ; be mindful, that after all we do, we are but unprofitable servants ; and thus, feeling the necessity of our continual reliance upon Jesus Christ, trust alone to *his righteousness* for acceptance with God. That this may be the sure foundation, to each one of us, of peace in this world, and of happiness in the next, may God of his mercy grant : AMEN.

The following hymns, composed for the occasion, made a part of the religious exercises of the evening.

HYMN First. *Isaiah*, 35th Chap.

THE wild and solitary place
Where lonely silence frown'd,
Awakes to verdure, light and grace,
With sudden beauty crown'd.

Through the long waste, neglected soil,
A stream of mercy flows,
And bids its thirsty desert smile,
And blossom as the rose.

Ye feeble hands your strength renew ;
Ye doubtful hearts believe ;
Unclose your eyes, ye blind, and view ;
Ye sad, no longer grieve.

Behold ! the deafen'd ear has caught
Salvation's raptured sound ;
Praise to the speechless lip is taught,
The helpless lost are found.

Say then, with joyful voice aloud,
Jehovah's work we see,
He hath his way within the cloud,
His footsteps on the sea.

But righteous is he to perform,
His word is truth indeed ;
And mid the sunshine or the storm,
His purposes proceed.

HYMN Second.

While in this glad, inspiring hour,
We praise Almighty grace and power,
While strains of grateful music rise,
E'en with their tone remembrance sighs.

He, who implor'd with zeal divine,
 A blessing on this great design,
 Now sleeps in dust ; and sad we bend
 To mourn the pastor and the friend.

Yet, oh ! if angels cloth'd in light,
 E'er hover round this vale of night ;
 If mortal wanderings ever prove
 Their watchful glance of guardian love ;

Perchance, he views his earthly home,
 This lonely flock, this holy dome,
 And while our humble prayers arise,
 Aids with his harp the sacrifice.

But who can speak his boundless joys,
 When those who heard their Shepherd's voice,
 Shall meet him in a world of rest,
 And join the spirits of the blest.

HYMN Third.

YE happy, rescued throng,
 Escap'd from gathering night,
 Who mourn'd in darkness long,
 While all around was light,
 As through the cloud
 The day-star gleams,
 Oh ! love the hand
 That gave its beams.

And ye whose soften'd souls
 Each generous feeling prove,
 Whose prayers and labours aid
 This ministry of love ;
 Jehovah's name
 Conspire to raise ;
 His was the work,
 Be his the praise.

FINIS.

